

2004 End of Session Report

Spring 2004



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Dear Neighbors:

The Legislature finished the scheduled 60-day legislative session March 11. This session update will provide you with information on the progress we made on issues of importance to families in the 41st District.

My ongoing commitment to budgeting for results, strengthening our economy and investing in Washington students' education remained as my guiding focus.

As always, I am overwhelmed with the number of phone calls, emails, letters and hotline messages I receive from you. Please keep them coming! They are tremendously helpful to me as I work on issues that we all face. The more we communicate the better I am able to serve you.

Sincerely,

Fred Jarrett



Budgeting for results

In 2003, the Legislature successfully adopted a balanced budget that did not raise general fund taxes. In 2004 the challenge before us was to make adjustments to the two-year budget to cover costs over the remainder of the biennium without abandoning the sound budget principles in the original budget.

In the end, I think we succeeded. Adjustments were made to health care for low-income children and services for the developmentally disabled. And we succeeded in investing additional resources in higher education.

2004 BUDGET OVERVIEW

- Increases general fund spending for 2003-05 by \$145.5 million.
- Increases investments in K-12 public schools by \$20 million.
- Includes \$113.3 million in new funding to protect health care and other human services for the state's most vulnerable citizens.
- Leaves reserves of \$278 million – about 1.2 percent of total revenues.

I believe we must rethink how the Legislature makes budget decisions. Deciding how to spend taxpayer dollars must be replaced by deciding what to buy and how what is bought advances our goals and priorities. By focusing on what we're getting, rather than what we're spending, we will begin to see results.

Education success

◆ Levy rollbacks

The legislature finally agreed on an approach to holding school districts' local levies harmless for the state's suspension of I-128 (the class size initiative) and I-732 (teacher cost of living increases). The bottom line is that the check voters signed for the school districts when they passed their local levies by greater than a 60% 'Yes' vote can now be cashed!



◆ Ensuring educational opportunities for all students

House Bill 2195 allows students as many as five chances to pass the 10th-grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning. Formerly, students had one opportunity to pass the exam. If they failed, they wouldn't graduate, and the failure rate was high – with only about a third of 10th-grade students passing the test last year. The bill provides up to four retakes and directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction to devise alternatives for students who fail the exam. It ensures teachers and parents are given more information on the areas where students performed well or poorly on the assessments, and options for those who need more than one opportunity to pass the WASL.



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Higher education

The supplemental budget funds 3,000 new higher education slots and \$145 million for enrollments in “high demand” degree fields. While these are positive first steps for higher education access and affordability, additional planning is crucial if we are going to adequately meet the needs of students.

In the next six to eight years, approximately 45,000 to 60,000 new spots will be needed in our colleges and universities to maintain current access levels for students projected to graduate from Washington high schools. Without legislative action, local students may find the doors to higher education closed or too costly, and businesses will need to import educated workers rather than hire our kids.

I was pleased to co-sponsor and help pass **House Bill 3103**, which directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board to work with the Legislature to study upcoming demands on our state’s universities and create a master plan to meet those needs. The legislation also requires the board to establish an accountability system and work more closely with other education agencies to improve transitions between K-12 and higher education.

In addition to HB 3103, a pilot project was funded in the budget to study performance contracts with Washington State University and the University of Washington. **These contracts will specify what each university’s responsibilities are under the state’s master plan, what they are committed to deliver in terms of the number, type and cost of degrees. Once implemented, performance contracts will shift higher education from a focus on spending to a focus on results.**

Legislature misses chance to pass meaningful lawsuit reform

Tort reform took center stage when session began, but rather than adopting solutions to reform our liability system, House and Senate negotiators couldn’t agree on meaningful reform. We’ll be back at it in 2005 when the Legislature has a 105-day session to work on the issue.

A new state primary system

Developing a responsible solution to a bad situation was the challenge we faced in finding common ground on replacing the state’s popular but unconstitutional blanket primary.

The compromise plan that passed the Legislature — the **Top 2** system — would allow voters to pick their favorite candidate for each office regardless of party affiliation. The top two vote-getters (potentially from the same party) would advance to the November ballot. The measure also included a “fallback” provision — a **Montana-style primary** — requiring that a voter mark only one party’s ballot, but ballot choice would be kept private.

The bill that got the final nod was not an ideal solution, but it came closest to preserving the most cherished elements of the nearly 70-year-old blanket primary: allowing independent-minded voters to keep party affiliation private while ensuring maximum choice

On April 1, Gov. Locke vetoed the “Top 2” part of the bill, and the backup Montana plan was left in place. The constitutionality of the governor’s veto is being challenged in court, and an initiative (I-872) has been filed to take the question to voters in the fall. Stay tuned, the primary decision remains unsettled!

2004 Election-year Mailing Restrictions

I’ll make every attempt to keep you informed on the issues mentioned in this newsletter and others that come before the 2004 Legislature. Unfortunately, due to election-year mailing restrictions, my ability to communicate with the people we represent is severely limited.

I am, however, allowed to respond to **ALL** specific, written requests from the citizens of the 41st District. If you would like to be updated on the happenings in the Legislature, please send a letter or an E-mail to my office regarding your interest and I’ll be happy to provide you with the information you need.

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